

GUIDE

*Official Publication of
Paulist Institute for Religious Research*

NEW UNDERSTANDING OF THE GOSPELS

David M. Stanley, S.J.

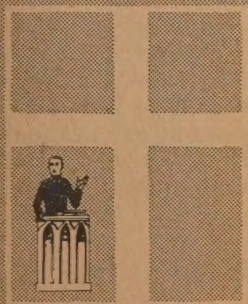
SOME PRINCIPLES OF THE CONVERT APOSTOLATE

Most Reverend Philip M. Hannan

CHRIST, SACRAMENT OF THE ENCOUNTER WITH GOD

Fergus Kerr, O.P.

DECEMBER 1961, No. 163





IT SEEMS TO ME

Prayer and Charity

Why do we Catholics not have greater spiritual impact on the non-Catholics in our parishes?

Pope John XXIII has his answer to this question. His reply is an old one. But because of his office and the personal qualities that have won him affectionate respect, his remedy deserves reflection—and decision.

"The faults of which we Catholics are not free, alas," says the Pope, "lie in our not having prayed enough to God to smooth the ways that converge on Christ's Church, in not having felt charity to the full, in not having practised it always toward our separated brethren, preferring the rigor of learned, logical, incontrovertible arguments to forbearing and patient love, which has its own compelling power of persuasion."

Back in 1908, an Anglican felt something of the need of prayer and charity if the scandal of divided Christendom was ever to be removed. So Father Paul Francis, later to become a Roman Catholic priest and founder of the Friars of the Atonement, organized an octave of prayer for Christian unity. It was blessed by Pius X in 1909, even before its founder became a priest. And what is now the Chair of Unity Octave was extended to the entire Church in 1916, with the blessings of Pope Benedict XV. And through the patient, unrelenting labors of Father Paul's disciples, American Catholics have become increasingly aware of the importance of the Chair of Unity Octave (January 18 to Jan. 25).

There can be little doubt that this huge stream of prayer has been blessed. Protestants, Eastern Christians and Catholics are more concerned about the unity desired by Christ than at any time in centuries. If you agree with Pope John that prayer and charity are the basic needs in our relations with non-Catholics, why not introduce the Octave to your parishioners next month? For do-it-yourself suggestions and literature write: Reverend Titus Cranny, S.A., Graymoor, Garrison, N. Y.

JOHN T. MCGINN, C.S.P.

GUIDE, No. 163, December, 1961.

Published 10 times a year (monthly except June-July, August-September when bi-monthly) by The Missionary Society of St. Paul the Apostle in the State of New York, 411 West 59th Street, New York 19, N. Y. Second class postage paid at New York, N. Y. Rates 1 year, \$1.00; 10¢ a copy; 5¢ a copy in bulk to Seminarians.

New Understanding of The Gospels

By Reverend David M. Stanley, S.J.

Nowadays there is considerable interest among Catholics in a relatively recent phenomenon, frequently described as "the new understanding of the Gospels," or "the new approach to the Gospels." If I were asked to select the salient features of this movement in Catholic Scriptural scholarship, I should say that it consists in (1) a more discerning appreciation of the Gospels as literature, and (2) a deeper insight into the *historical process* which produced them. When I speak of "the Gospels as literature," I refer to the various literary forms they display and to their doctrinal content, their biblical theology. When I speak of "the historical process which produced the Gospels," I understand the phrase in a twofold sense. It signifies, in the first place, the various moments in the creation of the four Gospels. In the second place, it connotes also the events of the Christian salvation-history which they record.

In his justly celebrated prologue to the third Gospel, St. Luke describes the authoritative source of the evangelical traditions, the members of the apostolic college, as "the original eye-witnesses, who became ministers of the Word" (Lk. 1, 2). This characterization of the first disciples of Jesus, it will be noted, is a double one, and merits our attention here inasmuch as it is concerned with the two essential elements that must function in any understanding of the nature and purpose of our Gospels: the event and the Word. It comprehends the sacred history of man's redemption through Jesus Christ as well as the "good news" (for that is what "gospel" literally means), the authoritative interpretation or expression of that history's meaning in the apostolic preaching.

The Gospel narrative, as the record of the historical process through which Christian

salvation became a reality, reposes upon the testimony of competent, reliable eye-witnesses. Indeed, the very character of the records themselves provides evidence of the manner in which, under the supervision of the primitive Christian community, they attained their definitive form, and so provides additional motives for the credibility of what they narrate.

However, Peter, John, and the other "original eye-witnesses" had a more formative function than that of simply attesting to the brute facts upon which their *kerygma*, their preaching, or message reposed. They "became ministers of the Word." As the hierarchical heads of a new religion, they testified above all the something which transcended mere ocular testimony: God's definitive entrance into human history, the significance, for man's redemption, of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, the *propter nos et propter nostram salutem* of the Creed. Thus in addition to, or rather upon the basis of, their attestation of a certain historical reality, they proclaimed their own Christian faith in the divine meaning of that reality. Without this element, their words would not be "the Word," "the Words of God" (Acts 13, 5; cf. 10, 36), "the Word of the Lord" (Acts 15, 36), "the Word of this salvation" (Acts 13, 26).

In the books we call the Gospels, this "witness of faith" is to be found in the inspired interpretation of the events set forth by the sacred authors. And the principal means of grasping the evangelists' message, as Pius XII has pointed out, is by discerning "the distinctive genius of the sacred writer," especially by a careful study of

"the literary forms which he used."

Accordingly, we wish, in the time at our disposal, to discuss two facets of this "new understanding of the Gospels": their literary character and the structural development by which they evolved. Such a review of the progress made in Gospel studies should bring us a more discriminating sense of their historical value as well as a more profound reverence for their Christology.

One area of Gospel studies in which progress has been made is in the investigation of what Pius XII called "the distinctive genius" of each evangelist, that is, his personal conception of New Testament salvation-history. For, each of the four evangelists, as we now know, has his own distinctive way of answering the question, "What manner of man is this?" Where Mark depicts Jesus Christ as the Son of God Who reveals by His actions His divinity no less than His complete humanity, Luke portrays Him as the second Adam, the Saviour of mankind, Who fulfills by what He is and what He teaches, the religious aspirations of the Hellenistic civilization that Luke knew and loved. For John, Jesus is the Incarnate Word become man in order to become our interpreter of "the God no man has ever seen" (Jn. 1, 18).

ST. MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

If we are to penetrate the secret of "the distinctive genius" of the authors of the Gospels, we must study their books as a literary unity and so endeavor to grasp their individual message. St. Matthew's Gospel may serve as an illustration of what I mean.

In many ways of course, the First Gospel resembles that of Mark or Luke. Not only does Matthew tell the same story, with the help of much the same sources, his theological outlook is also, in many respects, similar to theirs. He regards, as do they, the destruction of sin as the aim of Jesus' earthly career. He is no less conscious than they of the redemptive character of Jesus' death and resurrection. Moreover, the tragedy of Jesus' rejection as their Messiah by God's Chosen people is no less operative in the structuring of Matthew's Gospel than in that of Mark or Luke.

Matthew is however rightly renowned for his love of order and symmetry, his habit of omitting the irrelevant, his discipline and sense of proportion. His carefully construct-

ed account of Jesus' life exemplifies such qualities admirably.

To illustrate the principal theme of his story, Matthew has employed certain family reminiscences of Jesus' infancy. A genealogy shows Jesus deeply rooted in His people's past. The story of Jesus' virginal conception and birth reveals how, in His sacred history has made an utterly new beginning. The fidelity of the Magi, set in sharp contrast with the faithlessness and perversity of Herod, presages the choice of the Gentiles in place of the Jews in God's Kingdom, represented here below by the Church. The divine frustration of Herod's attempt upon the life of the infant Jesus foreshadows the final triumph of God's redemptive plan for mankind through the death and resurrection of Christ.

The Matthean account of Jesus' public ministry progresses in an orderly yet dramatic manner. The first stage in Jesus' mission, after His messianic investiture at His baptism by John shows Him winning the ear and heart of the Galilean crowds by His proclamation of the imminent establishment of God's sovereignty in this world and by His merciful, liberating work of healing those held under Satan's domination by diseases of various kinds. As His reputation grows and the work expands we see Him call the Twelve and entrust them with a share in His mission of preaching and curing men's ills. Soon, opposition from the vested interests of Judaism, represented by the scribes and Pharisees, begins to appear. Matters come to a head with their demand of "a sign" in proof of the validity of Jesus' claims. He excoriates His adversaries' bad will (they insinuate He is a tool of the devil), and promises only the "sign" of His own death and resurrection.

From now on, we see a decline in Jesus' popularity with the crowds, who by their apathy and obtuseness offer a kind of passive resistance to His teaching. Thus, in this second stage of Jesus' public life, we see Him concentrating more and more upon the instruction of His faithful adherents. He does not entirely abandon the fickle populace however, but teaches them through the parable, a brief, somewhat paradoxical story, calculated to arouse their curiosity and lead them to further inquiry.

St. Matthew shows, by contrast with the decline of Jesus' appeal to the generality of Galileans, the heart-warming growth of the

disciples' faith, which develops to a climax at Peter's profession of loyalty at Caesarea Philippi. Matthew takes advantage of Peter's dramatic avowal, in which he has received the virtualities of faith in Jesus' divinity, in order to record Christ's appointment of Peter as head of His future Church.

Thereafter, in Matthew's story, Jesus avoids publicity, avoids debate with His adversaries, whose opposition is continually on the increase, until He reaches Jerusalem and the *denouement* of his earthly career. A series of skirmishes with the Judean religious authorities reveal to us the gradual mounting of Jesus' anger until it bursts forth in a tragic and terrible denunciation of the bankruptcy of contemporary Judaism.

With this episode, Jesus' public ministry comes to an end. Events now move swiftly: Jesus is betrayed, arrested, unjustly condemned, maltreated, crucified. Matthew brings his book to a triumphant conclusion with a glimpse of the joyful reunion between the disciples and the risen Christ upon a certain mountain in Galilee.

MATTHEW'S PROCEDURE

When we attempt to analyse Matthew's literary procedure, we find that he has conducted the main body of his book, containing the account of Jesus' public ministry, by alternating narrative with discourse. He divides his material into five booklets (possibly to recall the five books of the Old Law), each devoted to some facet of "the kingdom of Heaven." As we read the carefully selected episodes and the skillfully composed sermons of Matthew, we gradually become conscious that, behind the immediate reality of Jesus' Galilean ministry, our author is giving us an insight into the nature and vision of the future Christian Church. She is revealed, in the Sermon on the Mount, as the perfect flowering of the Old Testament religious spirit. Subsequent discourses of Jesus disclose her orientation to the Gentile mission, her mysterious supernatural character, the brotherly love that must animate her members, her ultimate justification, by means of the destruction of the Temple, from the Judaism out of which she has risen.

It is this ecclesiastical character of the Matthean Gospel which has made it the Church's favorite for use in her liturgy. It

is also this quality which enables us to grasp the peculiarly Matthean features of the picture of Jesus Christ and His work, which this inspired book presents. He is, before all else, Emmanuel, "with us is God," as is stated in the prologue (Mt. 1, 23); and the author returns to this conception in the last words of the risen Christ which he records, "Remember, I am with you all the time until the end of history" (Mt. 28, 20). It is His desire to remain with us in His Church which has most appealed to St. Matthew about Jesus, "the Son of the living God" (Mt. 16, 16). It is this purpose of His mission which best characterized the "Good News" as set forth by the first evangelist.

LITERARY FORMS

What literary forms has modern scholarship discovered in our Gospels? In the first place, each of these books as a whole is now seen to possess a distinctive genre which we may call the Gospel-form. Since, in some respects, it represents the written account of the apostolic preaching, it has as its principal theme the "Good News" of salvation in Jesus Christ. But while the Gospel preached by the apostles was aimed at the non-Christian world to produce conversion, the written Gospel is directed to the Christian convert (like Luke's Theophilus), to provide a deeper comprehension of the meaning of the faith already accepted. "These things were written," John informs his reader, "in order that you may grow in your belief that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. . . ." (Jn. 20, 31). From this, it becomes evident that, for a valid interpretation of our Gospels, it is necessary to attend constantly to the dialogue between the author and his (Christian) reader. For the witness of the evangelist is, before all else, the witness of faith, and it is with this in mind that he has carefully recorded the testimony of "the original eye-witnesses."

Subordinated to this general Gospel-form are many other genres: the parable, the liturgical formula, the summary, the *midrash*, the popular story, the eye-witness account, the constructed scene, the sermon, the ode, the canticle, etc. All of these forms, whether fictional (like the parable), poetic (like the Magnificat), historical or didactic, express a certain kind of truth, indeed *inspired* truth, which is, consequently, the

object of Christian faith. The discerning of the literary form simply tells us better *how* it is to be believed: it does not eliminate any part of Scripture from the body of revelation. Nothing is more disconcerting for the teacher of Scripture, who has pointed out the fictional nature of a biblical book or passage, than the remark, "So we don't have to believe that any more."

The second area in which we have achieved a "new understanding of the Gospels," as I remarked at the beginning of this study, is that of the historical process which produced them. While a great deal is still unknown about the manner in which the Gospels were composed, a certain degree of reasonably solid progress has been made, as the result of the critical examination of the books themselves and of a clearer perception of the nature and history of the primitive Church.

Attention has been directed to the various centers of interest around which certain traditions crystallized: a liturgical interest, which produced written accounts of Jesus' passion probably quite early in the apostolic period, for use in the "breaking of the bread;" catechetical interest, which employed certain sayings and stories for the instruction of converts; an apologetic interest, which used certain incidents for the defense of orthodox doctrine and practice; a didactic interest, which evoked Jesus' authority to settle questions arising within the community itself; an ecclesiastical interest, which grew with the Church's consciousness of her own distinctive spirit and destiny; and finally, an historical interest, which exercised a preponderant role, because of the unique character of Christianity as an historical religion.

MISSIONARY PREACHING

The existence of an authoritative Gospel framework, composed in the very early days of the Church and handed on as normative for missionary preaching, appears today to be accepted widely. Paul himself testifies that he handed on just such an authoritative version of the "good news," received from his predecessors, the apostles (cf. 1 Cor. 15, 3, 11). In fact, Paul's letters provide evidence, at least in one instance (his account of the institution of the Eucharist, 1 Cor. 11, 23-25) of the great care, as regards form and expression, with which these

evangelical traditions were handed on. That this was probably the customary practice in the early Church with respect to the oral transmission of the materials later enshrined in our Gospels seems clear from what is known of the way in which contemporary Jewish teachers insisted upon the accurate memorizing, by their disciples, of certain doctrines.

It is moreover Peter himself who is indicated as the principal author of this apostolic preaching. In the opinion of the great majority of modern New Testament critics, the speeches in Acts are genuine summaries of this primitive preaching; and analysis reveals that the speeches attributed to Paul in Acts are basically the same in outline and in content as those ascribed to Peter. Granted that Luke, as Paul's traveling-companion, was well acquainted with Paul's sermon schemes, it seems evident that the Apostle followed, as indeed we have seen that he inserts in his letters, the traditional evangelical form which Peter had originally composed.

Recent attempts at a study of the distinctive biblical theologies, represented by various stages of the development, particularly, of Christology, in the apostolic age, have succeeded in tracing the steps in the evolution of Christian dogmas. We are thus able to evaluate the contributions, in the expression of the Christian revelation, made by men like Peter, Stephen, Paul, Matthew, and John. Above all, it has become more evident perhaps than formerly that Jesus Christ Himself was not only the One Person to Whom all these apostolic preachers and thinkers bear witness, but that He was the primary source of the Christian religion, as the One Who fulfilled in an utterly new, thoroughly creative manner, all the prophetic hope and aspirations of Old Testament history. The twofold testimony of the evangelists, to the historical reality of the events and of the Person they present (i.e., their eye-witness testimony), and to the supernatural significance of these events and of this Person, the Son of God (i.e., their witness of Christian faith), point infallibly to Jesus Christ, postulate His historical existence as well as His divine character. As John L. McKenzie has recently remarked, "If the apostolic preaching was the creative agent of this synthesis, then the disciples were greater than their Master."

I should like, in closing, to point out one

very important result of this "new understanding of the Gospels" for the simple reason that it may not, in the minds of many, appear to be a gain at all. We have come to realize the impossibility of writing a life of Christ in the modern biographical sense. Recent biblical scholarship has demonstrated the futility of trying to fix, in a chronological pattern, the majority of the events that made up the public ministry of Jesus. It would seem to be the part of scientific candor, no less than of Christian humility, to admit that all such attempts are foredoomed to failure, for the very good reason that this was not the way God willed to

have us learn Christ. Our astonishing ignorance of the exact dates of Jesus' birth and of His death are a striking proof of this: these facts, however, important in our eyes, simply do not belong to the data of the New Testament revelation. But to appreciate the impossibility of composing a life of Christ, to suit modern standards, possesses certain advantages. And not the least of these is a clearer perception of the profound truth there is in the statement of Père Lagrange: "the Gospels are the sole life of Jesus Christ that could be written. Our task is to understand them as best we can."

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Some Principles of the Convert Apostolate

By Most Reverend Philip M. Hannan, D.D.

I am extremely grateful for the invitation to be with you and to discuss informally some features of your important apostolate. It is a privilege to extend the deep gratitude of our Archbishop, and my own, to the Paulist Fathers for holding these Conferences and for the wonderful hospitality you now to us your guests.

Partly because our effort to win converts has been successful and partly because we have so large a number of inquirers, we can easily overlook a very significant fact. Each of our catechumens is an individual; and he is the product of a family background and religious tradition different from our own. Various manifold influences have been at work in his life and have shaped his character and outlook. To reach his real self and to prepare him for the Catholic life we cannot neglect these influences and their effect on him as a person.

Let me just cite a few simple instances of this principle which came to my attention recently.

A short time ago, I was asked to help in obtaining a stay of execution in behalf of a young chap who came from Washington. The crime had occurred eight years before

in Korea and it involved the cruel killing of a woman and the brutal beating of her husband. While in prison, the prisoner had taken instructions in the Faith. Since he had been born and raised in Washington, in a section of the city I know very well, I was asked to appeal to the President in his behalf.

Naturally, I had to make an inquiry as to the merits of his appeal. One feature of his case immediately impressed me. Evidence from his early life and that at the time he appealed to me indicated that he had come to an entirely different frame of mind. He was now a different person from the one who had committed the crime. Things had happened to him that had changed him and his outlook upon life. Nor was there any doubt about the sincerity and depth of this transformation.

Prominent among the causes of this reversal of principles and values was the influence of a good Catholic chaplain. The kindness of a Protestant lawyer who was

After dinner talk at Second National Conference on Convert Work, Seminary of the Paulist Fathers, Washington, D. C., October 1959.

donating his services, was also of immense influence in effecting this change. Perhaps the best expression of the effect this priest and the lawyer had upon his character was expressed, with unconscious eloquence, in a note the prisoner wrote to a friend: "Until this trouble happened to me, I did not know that this kind of a world existed."

Please recall that this prisoner had been born and raised in Washington, D. C., the capital of our nation and one of the greatest cities of the world. How was it possible for him to miss, in his early life, the idealism and Christian charity exemplified in the two men who came to his aid in a time of trouble? To answer that question, we would have to discuss social, political, cultural and historical questions that would take us far afield. But we know that it happens. And it highlights for us a significant factor in our apostolate.

NO TWO ALIKE

Each of our inquirers has been moulded, in large part, by his own experience and background. And this experience and background may often be very different from our own. Therefore, in dealing with our neophytes, we must be alert to these differences; we must try to understand where and how they originated; otherwise we will not be able to appreciate a man's real difficulties or reach his innermost heart. No two people are exactly alike. And we must take pains to know and assess the unique features of each inquirer who comes to us. However unpromising he may seem, he can change—if we know the factors that helped make him what he is and apply with patient charity the remedies he needs.

Another instance, although far removed from the first, illustrates the same point. A man, prominent in academic circles, was taken to the hospital simply for an inoculation. There was really nothing seriously wrong with him physically. But his childhood experience had led him to assume, unconsciously, that to be hospitalized indicated that one was critically ill. Despite his learning, earlier influences were so strong that merely being in a hospital almost scared him to death. His fright at the imminence of death was so great that friends thought he might seriously consider becoming a Catholic.

What leads people to think, speak and act

as they do is compounded of many elements. Heredity, education, environment—all enter into the matter. Naturally, I am not advocating the condoning of everything they say, do or think. But I do make a strong plea for trying to understand some of the main factors that have formed their personality. Before you can convert anyone you have to establish contact with him. And a prerequisite for making fruitful contact with anyone is to discover and understand as much as you can of his background. We must deal with numbers of inquirers. But let us remember that each is an individual requiring much personal attention.

There is another factor in conversion that I should like to stress. There seems to be a "psychological moment" favorable to conversion. Miss that opportunity and it may not return. Many of you men have been engaged in building operations. You know what I mean when I say that there is a time when the concrete is ready to be poured.

I was especially impressed by this thought on a trip to Berlin about six weeks ago. Since I had been in that city after the war with the first occupation troops, I could not help making comparisons between my observations on these two separate visits.

On my previous stay, I was amazed at the number of Protestants who attended Mass. And lest you misinterpret their motive, I hasten to say that they did not come out of desire for any material advantage. All these people did need food and material help of one sort or another. But there was no such gain to be attained by coming to Mass. They came from the highest spiritual motives and because of their deepening interest in the Catholic Church. Perhaps I should say that these people were Lutherans. And because I am related to many Lutherans on my mother's side, I deeply appreciate the significance of this change of attitude toward the Church which their attendance at Mass revealed.

A pastor who had been seventeen years in a Berlin parish, where he had won only three converts previously, was now hard pressed to accommodate the inquirers who approached him. Other pastors repeated similar gains. I recall expressing to a secretary—a member of a prominent Catholic family—my surprise at the very large number of Lutherans who were coming to my services. "I find this more incredible than

you," she replied. "This has never happened before."

Because of my interest in conversions, I quite naturally inquired of some of the same people I had known in 1945, regarding the present rate of conversions. They told me—and the present Cardinal of Berlin was one of them—"the wave of conversions has practically disappeared. The number of converts is back where it was. We win an occasional convert now, but that's all." A large part of the explanation of why we did not follow up on that earlier advantage is that we did not have a sufficient number of priests. I was so greatly convinced of the need of capitalizing on our exceptional opportunity that I wrote appeals to obtain additional priests; but my efforts unfortunately were unavailing.

FAVORABLE MOMENT

Here was a situation where numerous souls were deeply interested in becoming Catholics. But the favorable occasion passed, and it has not returned. There are times when individuals and groups of people are extraordinarily receptive toward Catholicism. And it would be a pity if we did not pursue this advantage. God's Providence is mysterious. And we can penetrate His ways only so far. But speaking from our limited understanding, it seems to be a good rule—even in the matter of conversion—to strike while the iron is hot.

Speaking of this matter of a "psychological moment," I am reminded of a chat I had recently with a former Communist who fled to the West. His experience illustrates some aspects of our problem in conversion. As a young man, he was a completely devoted Communist. Indeed, he even reported to the authorities on his father and mother. (Fortunately, he divulged inconsequential matters which did not really compromise them seriously. He loved his parents dearly.) Later on, the stress of actions which violated his conscience began to disturb him. He had been involved, for example, in the complete destruction of a famous German jurist. More and more, he was impelled to examine the nature of the system he was supporting. He finally decided that, in conscience, he had to defect to the West. This involved leaving his wife and child without a word: otherwise they might have denounced him to the Communists.

My point is that in his case, he had spent his early years endeavoring to get ahead. All his thought and energy were devoted to advancing his position within the Communist regime. It was only when he had, to a very large extent, achieved this ambition that he was in a position to think seriously about larger issues. It would seem that the question of right and wrong and the necessity of a grave decision did not fully present itself until he was psychologically conditioned. And it is to his credit that at the price of enormous sacrifice, he chose to follow his conscience.

You men know, from daily experience, the heroic sacrifices some people must make to become Catholics. And you realize that every conversion involves considerable thought and a momentous choice. Humanly speaking, a person is hardly capable of this reflection, decision and sacrifice every day of his life. Some occasions, however, are much more conducive to this. For one person it will be the period when he is preparing for marriage. For others it may come later in life, when they have reached a settled condition which enables them to reflect on the deeper meaning of life. As you know so well, these occasions are special moments of grace. And my plea is that we try to make ourselves available at those times when the Lord knocks at the door of their hearts.

ZEALOUS PRIESTS

In saying all this, I am not forgetting the indefatigable zeal of American priests. I testify to it and praise it. One of the striking differences between the Church in the United States and that in Europe is the number of converts we win here in America. When visiting priests and bishops from abroad drop in at the Chancery in Washington, I take occasion to remark how active and successful our priests are in the apostolate to non-Catholics. These visitors sometimes assume too quickly that the progress of the Church in the United States is explained by our material resources. Closer acquaintance with us would reveal the persevering, dynamic urge of our priests to communicate the truths of Christ to all our citizens. This is at the basis of our growth in the United States.

Conferences like this one are an enormous help to all of us. They enable us to learn

from one another; to make a fruitful exchange of views; to compare various approaches; and to help us persevere in our tremendously important work. Indeed, I'd like to say that you are giving praiseworthy example not only to the priests of our country but to those throughout the world.

The zeal of the American priest is becoming a standard of excellence even in Europe. This began with the work of our chaplains during the past war. And this influence has continued. European priests read a great deal about the Church in our country. And they adapt many of our practices to the solution of their specific problems. During the past year, I went to Eu-

rope to administer Confirmation at various Air Force Bases. And it was part of my duty to help cement good relations between the Air Force and the nearby Catholic civilians and pastors. And I could not help but notice how, when they had accomplished something outstanding in their parishes, they would timidly ask if we were achieving the same success, or greater, in the United States.

In closing, I'd like to assure you of the far reaching effects of your daily work. By learning to better your techniques and by sustaining your zeal, you are not only advancing the cause of Christ in our own land but all over the world.

Christ, Sacrament of the Encounter With God

By Fergus Kerr, O.P.

It is a mistake to think that nothing has happened in theology since the death of St. Thomas. Far too little has happened, it is true, and far too often a theological training has meant nothing more than an exchange of theological *clichés* and the manipulation of unreal problems. In the last thirty years or so, however, in response to a period of intense social and moral unrest, when all values have been under revision, theology too, which is the self-consciousness of faith, has taken a fresh lease of life. We have had no theologian of the stature of Karl Barth, who put through, single-handed, a revolution which affected Catholic theologians almost as deeply as Protestants. But we have had a whole generation of gifted theologians, mostly Jesuits, whose curiosity, learning, compassion and invention have done much to enliven our understanding of the faith, and to fortify us to confront the stress and the adventure of our environment.

Few of these writers and teachers have more to offer than Father Schillebeeckx, a Flemish Dominican who is professor of theology in the Catholic university of Nijmegen. He has done the most massive and decisive

work in recent years on the doctrine of the sacraments. Most of his work is accessible so far only in Dutch, but it is with great satisfaction that we see this popular exposition of his basic ideas becoming available to the French-reading public.¹ It was written for theological students, catechists, and theologically interested layfolk. The level of theological and biblical culture it assumes is deeper than is yet common in England, but this need not put anybody off. It is not the kind of book one would ever read quickly. Taken slowly and carefully, it could be a theological education in itself. Evidently, the professional theologian will want to dispute certain points, or seek clarifications. The ordinary reader, however, can rest assured of Father Schillebeeckx's profound fidelity to the finest traditions of theology. The book cannot be too highly recommended to anybody who can cope with not very difficult French.

Simply by adhering to the bedrock fact of our faith, that God has come to us in Christ, Father Schillebeeckx is enabled to make a fresh survey of the whole of theology, bringing out its rootedness in the gospel, and lead-

ing everyday life and piety into the theological setting in which the message may be most fruitfully heard. He sets out to teach us about the sacraments by reminding us of Christ. To understand the sacraments, we must go back to their origin in the incarnation itself.

THE NEW COVENANT

The incarnation, God's coming to us in Christ, was the culmination of a long process of preparation. The history of Israel is the history of God's desire for a personal relationship, a *communio*, between himself and the human race. The entire revelation of the Old Testament is the history of the course of this affair. It is in this process of God's invitation to love and Israel's repeated infidelity that revelation takes shape. Where there should have been only co-operation, consent, and loving dialogue, there was instead resistance, defiance, and deadly antagonism. And yet, in the worst of it, God undertook to create a relationship with the human race, a *covenant*, which could never be soiled and betrayed by human infidelity.

This relationship, the *new covenant*, the *new testament*, is Jesus Christ himself. He embodies this loving dialogue between man and God. In Jesus, we may say, God loves man and man loves God. This is what it is to be the God-man. It is to be, in his very being at all, complete communion between man and God. Jesus is the totality of all possible communion between man and God (which is why we can say that he is the Church). The everlasting covenant was achieved by God's becoming human and entering into a permanent and irrevocable relationship with himself on our behalf. God's fidelity and man's fidelity to the covenant are realized together in the history of Jesus Christ. He is at one and the same time grace made visible and the human race in communion with the living God. To meet him was to meet God. 'Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father' (John 14. 9). Jesus is 'the icon of the hidden God' (Col. 1. 15).

Indeed, he is a sacrament, *the sacrament*. In his very existence, he fulfills the traditional conditions for a sacrament. A sacrament, as St. Thomas would have said, is a *signum rei sacrae in quantum est sanctificans*

homines. That is, a sacrament is that which shows us the sacred reality in the very act of sanctifying the human race. If we are to give a name to *that* sign, it must be the name of Jesus. He is the supreme efficacious sign of grace. He is the paradigmatic sacrament. His human love is the sacrament of God's love for men, the redeeming mercy of the eternal God descending on us in a human heart. His human love is the manifestation, declaration, and communication of God's love. Everything he does, and is, is shot through with that love. Everything he does, therefore, is redeeming and sanctifying. This is the condescension of grace, entering human history in the heart of Jesus, to sanctify the human race.

There is, however, also an upward movement in the God-man's heart. This is the prayer of Jesus, his life-long acknowledgment and adoration of the absolute divinity of God, his perfect sense of creaturely dependence on the Father. His life was wholly an act of worship, his life was a permanent liturgy. Jesus is not only the definitive emergence into history of God's invitation to the human race to live in communion with him. He is also the prototype, the complete expression of the perfect human response to that invitation. Putting the two together, now, as Father Schillebeeckx does, we can say that Jesus Christ is a 'sanctifying cult-mystery.' That is, being at once Servant of Yahweh and Son of God, his life is a perfect unity of liturgy and grace, of serving God and of saving men.

PERPETUAL ADVENT

Since the ascension, however, this 'sacred reality,' ever-living and indestructible, has withdrawn from the scope of our experience. Christ is risen, and hence out of ordinary contact with us. We can no longer meet God in another man, as Philip and the other disciples were invited and enabled to do. Christian life now is a perpetual advent, a state of waiting for the Lord, not of being with him. Christianity, as Father Schillebeeckx puts it, is the religion of *maranatha*. But this is not the whole story. That we wait at all makes sense only because we still, or already, enjoy a certain contact with the

¹ Courtesy of *Life of the Spirit*, Aug.-Sept., 1961. An extended book review. A translation is promised shortly by Sheed and Ward.

risen Lord. This takes place not only in our memories of him, not only even in our faith in his invisible activity in the world, but in our faith in the visible manifestation of his presence in the Church.

Just as Jesus Christ is the sacrament of our encounter with God, so the Church is the sacrament of our encounter with Jesus Christ, now risen and ascended into glory. In the visible activities of the Church, the heavenly Christ sacramentalizes his permanent intercession and efficacious communication of grace. The sacraments, then, are the visible earthly expression of the 'sanctifying cult-mystery,' of the reality of salvation itself. It is in and by the sacraments that we enter into contact with this mystery. The earthly Church is the sign of Christ's triumphant grace—or, putting it the other way round, the living reality of the risen Christ is 'ecclesialized,' that is, takes the visible shape of the community which we know as the Church, so that its characteristic behavior—the sacraments—may give expression to Christ's own heavenly activity. The Church is Christ, sacramentally, 'mystically,' and the Church's official actions—the sacraments—are Christ's own actions. The sacraments are, in one way or another, the great gesture of love by which we are redeemed, reappearing in the setting of the Church, touching each one of us personally and palpably.

EACH CHRISTIAN A SIGN

But these privileged moments are not exotic or unaccountable, entirely set apart from the rest of our lives. One cannot isolate the sacraments from life, and the splendid way in which Father Schillebeeckx proceeds to integrate his outline of sacramental doctrine into a general theory of Christian life should be of particular interest to layfolk. Briefly, if the rest of a man's behavior is not a preparation for, an expression or intensification of, his sacramental behavior, it must at least be a dissipation and annulment of it. One can have moments of greater depth or actuality of religious experience outside the sacraments, but the sacraments always remain the normal *points de repère*, the moments which epitomize the rest of our life. Every Christian's life is the visible sign of grace in the world. That the Church is the 'sign lifted up among the nations' is verified not only in encyclicals

and pontifical ceremonies but also in the self-sacrificing love, the responsibility, the humble confidence, with which ordinary Christians face the trials of everyday life. Grace becomes manifest in the world in the personal holiness of each one of us: that is where God invites unbelievers to find him. People cannot be expected to believe in the Church unless they see that we love one another—unless the reality of charity is made present in their lives by their contact with Christians.

It is impossible to give an adequate account of all that this slim book contains. One might, however, in view of the revision of our attitudes to our separated brethren which is in process, draw attention to the useful remarks Father Schillebeeckx has to make about the value of non-Catholic sacraments. All in all, one cannot imagine a work of theology which could be at the same time more solidly grounded in traditional doctrine and more engaged in the special challenges of living the faith at this time.

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Guide Lights

IN THE VERNACULAR VEIN . . .

The Vernacular Society of Great Britain has appealed to Rome for use of the English language in the celebration of Mass and in administration of the sacraments and liturgical blessings. The plea was made in a memorandum to the Central Preparatory Commission for the Second Vatican Council. The memorandum recalled the repeated urging of the Church for active participation of the laity in the liturgy. It suggested that this is virtually impossible with an all-Latin liturgy. The society commented:

"We recognize frankly that these petitions are of a very radical nature, and we would not advance them save that they are the natural and logical outcome of the reaction of many scholars and pastors of souls to a profound conviction that for many centuries the true nature of the Church's liturgy has been obscured and that, in consequence, the efficacy of the liturgy has not been exploited to the greatest advantage of all the faithful. We believe that neither laity nor clergy have been able to derive from the liturgy that wealth of divine grace, of instruction and motivation, which would be possible if the liturgy had upon them the impact for which it was called into being by the divine Master and by our holy mother the Church."

IT MAKES SENSE IN CINCINNATI . . .

A less extensive petition for the vernacular also found its way to Rome from St. Clare's Parish in College Hill, a suburb of Cincinnati. There the priests explained at Sunday Masses that the use of Latin was not an essential requirement, and that prelates preparing for the coming ecumenical council had asked for opinions on the subject from the laity. A total of 922 persons, representing about 60% of the adults of the parish, signed the petition. It called for the use of English in the parts of the Mass appropriate to vocal recitation by the people. It was content, however, to leave the other parts in Latin.

The petition indicated a better percentage in favor of the vernacular than that discovered in a poll by the Catholic Free Press of Worcester. The question asked in the poll, however, extended to other ceremonies and made no provision for the retention of any Latin in the Mass. The findings were that 51.2% favored English; 33.7% were opposed; and 15.1% were undecided.

THE PULSE OF THE WORCESTER PUBLIC . . .

The Free Press poll concerned itself with other questions of some interest including daily evening Mass, Sunday sermons, and lay activity. On evening Mass, 51.6% were for it and only 17.3% against. The rest (31.1%) were undecided. On sermons, there was not much agreement. (31.9% thought they were mediocre and 31.5% thought they were interesting. A good segment (27.6%) found them thought provoking and spiritually beneficial and 9.3% said they were boring and without benefit.

The question of lay activity was expressed in this manner: "Which of the following do you consider the most useful method of bringing laymen into the active life of the Church?" There were four choices: Parish social functions; Teaching and study programs of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine; Organizations which visit the sick, aid the unfortunate, etc.; Church services which allow direct lay participation, such as dialogue Masses. Parish social functions won handily with 33.3%. Services with lay participation and the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine came very close to each other. The former garnered 25.5%, and the latter 24.3%. The Charitable organizations trailed with 16.5%.

NUGGETS FROM A NUNCIO . . .

On this question of lay activity, there was an interesting item in "Persons, Places and Things," a column which appears regularly in the Catholic Messenger of Davenport, Iowa. A local couple took a trip to Peru where they met Archbishop Romolo Carboni, the Apostolic Nuncio. Much of their talk centered around the apostolate to Latin America, particularly the role of the layman in that apostolate. The American visitors had this to report:

"He gave us a statement to take back. In fact he repeated it four times and made us write it out. Here it is: 'The Catholic layman can and must perform all the duties in the Catholic Church as performed by the clergy, with the exception of those acts directly empowered to priests through the sacrament of ordination—the offering of Mass, the sacraments of Confession and Extreme Unction.' All the rest he wants us to do—preaching, catechetics, theology and so forth."

The Nuncio's statement gives rise to some questions by its brevity and consequent lack of qualification, but it is a vigorous declaration of a trend which is receiving more and more attention. It is certainly a trend which will be noted and discussed in the ecumenical council. And it is one which is already receiving some implementation on a professional level. In this country there are laymen being trained to run parish instruction centers. And in France a dozen bishops have decided to set up a normal school, perhaps more than one, to train catechists, lay people who would support themselves by teaching catechism.

THE OFFICIAL FIVE . . .

The five men chosen by the Holy See to be official observers at the World Council of Churches meeting at New Delhi are all experts on various aspects of non-Catholic religions. The American, Father Edward Duff, S.J., wrote his doctoral dissertation on "Social Thought of the World Council of Churches." When it was published as a book in 1961, it was a selection of the Religious Book Club, a Protestant organization.

Father Jan C. Grot is President of the St. Willibrord Society in Holland. This is a group which promotes Christian reunion. It has organized a number of discussions between priests and ministers. Father Le Guillou, O.P., is the third western representative. He has been associated for most of his priesthood with Istina, the Dominican institute at Paris for non-Catholic studies. He is a specialist on the Orthodox Churches.

Two Indian priests, both of whom have graduate degrees in theology and have written extensively in both English and Indian tongues, are the other observers. One is Father Ivan Extross, director of a movement for contacting non-Catholic Christians and Hindus. The other is Father Joseph Edarmaram, S.J. Among his published works are "Pilgrimages Hindu and Christian" and "The Psychology of Conversion."

INADVERTENT INFORMATION . . .

On this matter of observers, as we go to press there is a UPI report from the Vatican which quotes informed sources to the effect that an official decision has been made to invite non-Catholic Christian Churches to send observers to the forthcoming Vatican Council. Details of the protocol of issuing invitations and arranging the seating must be worked out. Then the entire matter must be approved by Pope John. This, however, was said to be a formality. The Press Office of the Preparatory Committee warned that this was no official announcement and

advised against premature speculation on whether and how many non-Catholic groups would be invited. It would seem that the news leaked out from some special spigot.

At any rate, it was out, and the Rev. Dr. Roswell P. Barnes, executive secretary of the New York office of the World Council, was delighted to receive it. He said: "This is part of the new climate which has been developing in the last several years." He added: "There is a long way to go in mutual understanding. Neither Roman Catholics, nor Protestants, nor Eastern Orthodox are reaching agreements. But we are making progress toward understanding each other."

DEPARTMENT OF STATISTICS . . .

The Catholic Students' Mission Crusade has issued a 1961 World Mission Map which shows in graphic form the distribution of Catholics throughout the world. The map indicates that there are 550,356,000 Catholics. This is 18.3% of the total population according to the figures given. In the United States there are 42,104,900 (22.9% of the population). And in Canada there are 8,066,500 (44.2% of the population). Tiny Andorra, located between Spain and France, is the world's only 100% Catholic nation. All 6,000 of its people are listed as Catholic. On the other end of the scale, there are only 7 out of 30,000 in Greenland.

Persistent reports indicate that Rome is disquieted at the shortage of priests per Catholic population in some areas like South America. The coming Council may strive to arrange a more equal distribution.

AMERICAN CHURCH GROWTH . . .

The Yearbook of American churches for 1962 indicates that religious growth in the United States may be levelling off for the first time in almost a generation. Membership gains in America's churches and synagogues since 1945 had outstripped the rate of population increase. In 1960, however, the increase was only slightly greater, 1.9% compared to 1.8%.

Total church and synagogue membership was listed at 114,449,217. This represents 63.6% of the population compared to 16% in 1850, and 36% in 1900. Of this number 63,668,835 were Protestants; 42,104,900 were Catholics; 5,367,000 were Jews; 2,698,663 were Orthodox; 589,819 were Old Catholics, Polish National and Armenians. Protestant bodies reported an increase of 1.8%, equal to the national population gain. The rate of growth in Catholicism was 3.2%.

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